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Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 051330
ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 VO-05 CA-01 L-03 /037 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:WNHOWELL:PDW
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DESIRED DISTRIBUTION
NEA DISTRIBUTION ONLY
----------066257 282029Z /41
O 282012Z FEB 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 051330

STADIS////////////////

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, US, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY: NEXT TRANCHE OF MARRIAGE PETITIONS

1. TOTAL OF 48 RPT 48 ADDITIONAL MARRIAGE PETITIONS RECEIVED IN DEPARTMENT FROM SHALOM AND PROCESSED THROUGH DEPT AUTHENTICATION UNIT.

2. HOWELL TELEPHONED AMBASSADOR QABBANI FEB 28 TO INFORM HIM THAT NEA/ARN PLANNED DELIVER PETITIONS TO EMBASSY FOR CERTIFICATION SAME AFTERNOON. HOWELL HAD PREVIOUSLY INFORMED QABBANI (LAST WEEK) THAT WE EXPECTED RECEIVE ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS IMMINENTLY AND WOULD BE SEEKING EMBASSY CONSULAR SERVICE BEFORE TRANSMISSION TO DAMASCUS.

3. ALTHOUGH QABBANI HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY INDICATED THAT THERE WOULD BE PROBLEM IN ROUTINE EMBASSY CERTIFICATION, CONFIDENTIAL

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HE STATED FEB 28 THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO SEEK APPROVAL FROM SYRIAN AUTHORITIES BEFORE CERTIFYING PETITIONS. WHEN HOWELL OBSERVED THAT EMBASSY CONSULAR SERVICE IMPLIED NO COMMITMENT ON PART OF SYRIAN AUTHORITIES, QABBANI TALKED ABOUT PUBLICITY RELATING TO LAST GROUP AND, IN PARTICULAR, DWELLED ON PUBLIC CREDIT SOLARZ TOOK FOR THAT DEVELOPMENT. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT EXPLICITLY SAY HE WAS UNDER ORDERS FROM DAMASCUS

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TO SEEK PRIOR APPROVAL BEFORE PROVIDING EMBASSY

CERTIFICATION, QABBANI IMPLIED AS MUCH AND APPEARED SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED BY THE ARGUMENTATION HE USED TO SUPPORT HIS CASE.

4. WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER QABBANI'S NEW-FOUND HESITANCY RESULTS FROM INSTRUCTIONS HE HAS RECEIVED OR FROM HIS PERSONAL RELUCTANCE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT COULD TURN OUT TO BE A CONTROVERSIAL CASE IN THE SYRIAN CONTEXT. HE MAY BE UNCERTAIN OF HOW TO BEHAVE ON THIS MATTER IN LIGHT OF ASSAD'S RECENT VISIT TO MOSCOW AND LATE-BREAKING NEWS REPORTS HERE BASED ON TISHRIIN ITEMS RE ATHERTON MISSION. WHATEVER THE CAUSE, WE HAVE HIT A SNAG.

5. WE WOULD APPRECIATE THOUGHTS OF EMBASSY DAMASCUS ON THIS SITUATION AND MOST EXPEDITIOUS MEANS OF ADDRESSING IT POSITIVELY. ONE ALTERNATIVE THAT QABBANI SUGGESTED WOULD BE A LETTER FROM ARN LISTING THE PETITIONS ON THE BASIS OF WHICH HE WOULD CABLE FOR INSTRUCTIONS FROM SYRIA. HE ALSO SAID THAT, IF WE PROVIDED PETITIONS THEMSELVES TO HIM, HE COULD TRANSMIT THEM, WITHOUT SYRIAN EMBASSY CERTIFICATION, DIRECTLY TO SYRIAN GOVERNMENT. LATTER MODE WOULD CERTAINLY GET PETITIONS INTO SYRIAN GOVERNMENT CHANNELS QUICKLY, BUT WE WOULD NOT WANT TO ENCOUNTER SITUATION IN WHICH PETITIONS REJECTED THERE BECAUSE
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REQUIRED SIGNATURES NOT AUTHENTICATED. IN EITHER CASE, THESE PROCEDURES CERTAINLY DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO OUR OBJECTIVE OF ROUTINIZING HANDLING WITHIN THE SARG.

6. SHALOM PLANS ARRIVE DAMASCUS ON SUNDAY, MARCH 5 AND ASKS THAT SOMEONE FROM EMBASSY MEET HIM AS HE WILL BE CARRYING GIFTS FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY AND HIS SYRIAN CONTACTS ETC. WE WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH HIS FLIGHT DATA AS SOON AS AVAILABLE; DRAPER SPOKE WITH HIM BY PHONE PRIOR TO OUR CONTACT WITH QABBANI AND SHALOM EXPRESSED HOPE THAT PETITIONS COULD ARRIVE DURING HIS 10-DAY STAY IN SYRIA. IF NOT, HE WOULD BE DISPOSED TO POSTPONE TRIP TO DAMASCUS. WE ENCOURAGED HIM TO GO AHEAD WITH PRESENT PLAN TO ARRIVE THERE MARCH 5, BUT SAID WE WOULD SEEK YOUR VIEWS. WE HAVE NOT APPRAISED HIM OF LATEST SNAG WITH SYRIAN EMBASSY AND WOULD NOT PLAN TO DO SO UNTIL WE HAVE HEARD FROM EMBASSY DAMASCUS. VANCE

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